

✓ Check Your Child's Car Seat!

Choosing and Using Car Seats Correctly

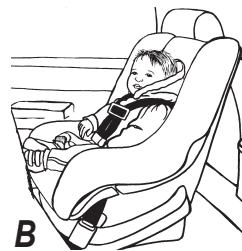
☐ Is your child using the right car seat?

STAGE 1: Rear-facing seat—Facing the rear is the safest way for a baby or toddler to ride.

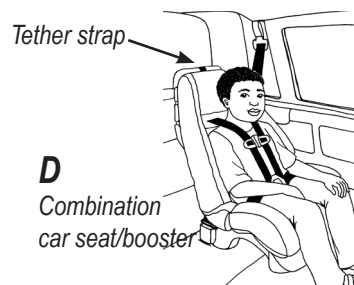
Under age 1: Small, infant-only car seats (**A**) always face the rear and are easy to carry. Make sure the baby's head is at least an inch below the top of the car seat.

Convertible seats (**B**) face the rear for babies up to 30 to 45 pounds (check label), then can be changed to face forward. (**C**, below).

Over age 1: Continue facing rear in a convertible seat until the child is at the seat's rear-facing weight limit or the child's head is an inch below the top of the car seat.



STAGE 2: Forward-facing seat with harness (C, D)—for a child over age 1 and over 20 pounds, up to 40 to 80 pounds. May be a convertible seat, combination seat (forward-facing seat/booster), built-in car seat, or vest.



STAGE 3: Booster seat with lap-shoulder belt (E)—for older children (4 to 8+), from 40 pounds to 80 to 100 pounds. Seat belts do **not** fit children correctly until at least age 8. **Always** use a lap-shoulder belt with a booster, **never** a lap-only belt.

In lap-only belt positions: Use a vest or car seat with harness made for kids over 40 pounds.



☐ Is the car seat second-hand?

- **Be careful with used car seats.** Make sure you have the instructions and any recalls have been fixed. Make sure it has not been in a crash, as there can be hidden damage. Check for an expiration date on the seat. If there is none, avoid seats older than 6 years.

☐ Does your child ride in back?

- **The back seat** is much safer than the front. Correctly buckle up children under 13 in the back seat.
- **Air bag safety:** **Never** put an infant in a rear-facing car seat in front with an air bag. The force of the air bag can kill any child sitting or leaning too close to the dashboard. If the truck or car has an air bag on/off switch, **turn it off** if a child must ride in the front seat.

☐ Are you following the instructions?

- Always follow instructions for your child's car seat.
- Always look in the car owner's manual for important information about using a car seat in your car.

☐ Is the car seat tightly installed?

- Car seats can be attached with either a seat belt or LATCH anchors (if both vehicle and car seat have LATCH). Use whichever gives the tightest fit. Do **not** use both, unless all instructions say it is okay.
- A tight fit means the car seat moves less than 1 inch forward or side to side. (Pull near the base.)
- Put the belt or LATCH strap in the correct path (check labels). If using LATCH straps, make sure you hook to the correct anchors in the car (check car manual).
- Always use a tether strap on forward-facing car seats.

☐ Are the harness straps the right height? Are they snug on your child?

- For rear-facing seats, shoulder straps should be as close as possible to the child's shoulders **or below**.
- When facing forward, straps must be **at or above** the shoulders. For **some** seats, only the top slots can be used when forward facing (check instructions).
- Make harness straps snug, so you cannot pinch the straps. Make sure they are not twisted.
- Put chest clip at armpit level.

Resources

NHTSA Auto Safety Hotline: 888-327-4236, www.safercar.gov
SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.: 800-745-7233, www.carseat.org
Find a Child Passenger Safety Technician: 866-732-8243, www.seatcheck.org

